



Given Names, Patronymics and Surnames in Wales

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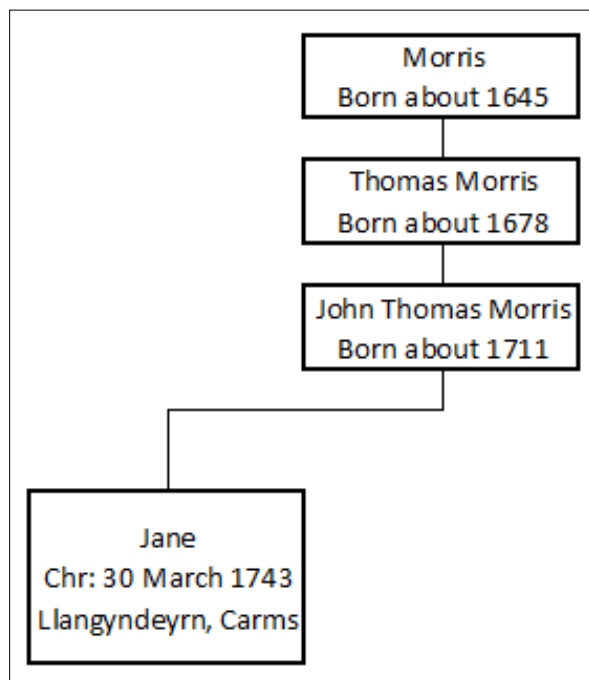
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Welsh Names and Patronymics

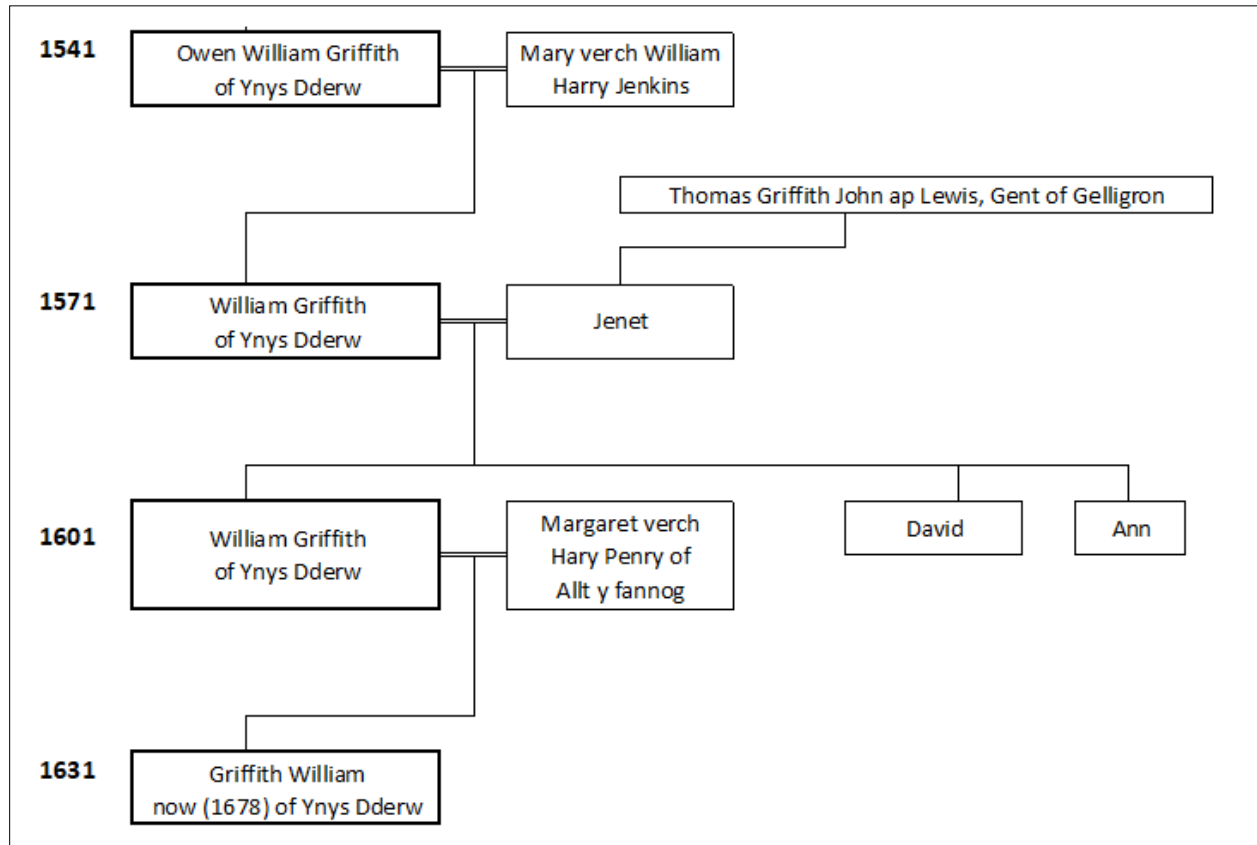
One of the more complicated aspects of Welsh family history is the common surnames and given names. This is due to the patronymic naming system used in Wales where a child had a given name and used the father's given name for a second name. Details vary on when and where families started using the typical English surname system. The areas along the coast and borders with England were generally first to adopt fixed surnames.

Why I Love Patronymics

One record can give you several generations of family information. The christening of Jane daughter of John Thomas Morris on 30 March 1743 at Llangyndeyrn Carmarthenshire is a common example.



Welsh manuscript pedigrees are another important source for Welsh families. This pedigree helps illustrate the use of patronymics in one family for a time period before the parish records survive.



Given Names

The small pool of given names adds a level of difficulty. The British 19th Century Surname Atlas can be used to search for the distribution of names in Wales. It is available at the Family History Library or can be ordered directly from Archer Software.

- <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1134601?availability=Family%20History%20Library>
- <http://www.archersoftware.co.uk/satlas06.htm>

Patronymic connectors

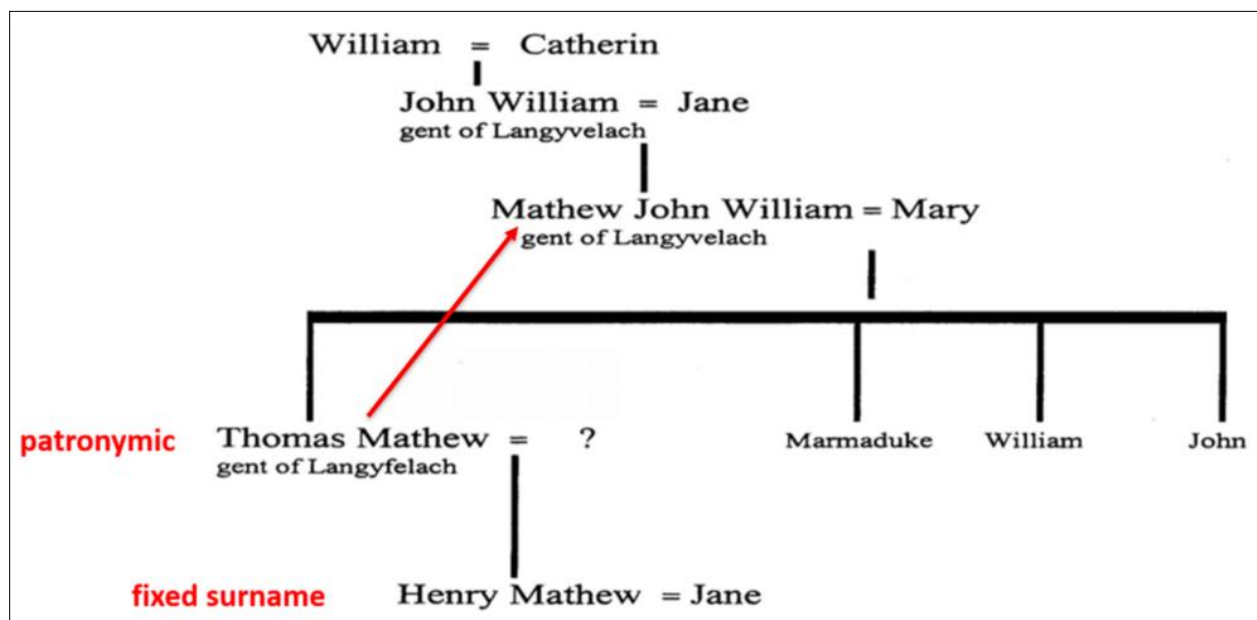
- Mab or ab or ap = son of
- Ferch or verch = daughter of
- In South Wales ab or ap was not always used

Patronymic examples

- Evan Rees ap John (clear indication with the word for “son of”)
- William Morgan John (short form of William ap Morgan ap John)
- David William (typical form before the use of fixed surnames)
- David Williams (the s at the end of the name indicates a fixed surname)

Transition from Patronymics to Fixed Surnames

Various areas of Wales, families and individuals adopted fixed surnames at different times. Look carefully at what is discovered about your family to be certain when the transition happened for your ancestors.



Top Ten Surnames in Wales

1. Jones	4. Evans	7. Lewis	10. Griffiths
2. Williams	5. Thomas	8. Hughes	
3. Davies	6. Roberts	9. Morgan	

By-names, Nicknames, Bardic Names

- Shon Hicks (John Hicks)
- Howell Gellilwca (Howell Llewellyn)
- Ap Llewelyn (John William)
- Billy Rheol Odu ap deulu
- Thomas o'r Maendu
- Crwys (William Williams)
- Hen Domos (John Jenkin)
- Philip Rhydyfro (Philip Dafydd)
- Jacob Y Gwehydd [Jacob the Weaver] (Jacob Thomas of Gellinudd)

Searching Parish Registers Online

The indexing of Welsh parish registers and Bishop's Transcripts has varied in the way that patronymics has been handled.

Parish Registers on FamilySearch and Findmypast are indexed as if everyone used fixed surnames.

Example title: Wales, Anglesey, Parish Registers, 1538-1912

Bishop's Transcripts on FamilySearch and any commercial partner sites are indexed in two ways:

- before 1812 names are indexed as if everyone used patronymics
- from 1812 forward names are indexed as if everyone used fixed surnames

FamilySearch Bishop's Transcripts: Wales Births and Baptisms, 1541-1907

Wales Deaths and Burials, 1586-1885

Wales Marriages, 1541-1900

Further Reading

Morgan, T. J. *Welsh Surnames*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. 2017.

Rowlands, John, and Sheila Rowlands. *The surnames of Wales*. Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Company. 2014.